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Local businesses, school district respond to Easton Suburban Water Authority alert

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EASTON | Due to an Easton Suburban Water Authority alert Saturday, bottled water became quite the hot commodity in the greater Easton area this weekend.

"Bottled water is flying off the shelves," Tracy Pawelski, a Giant Food Stores spokeswoman, said of the Forks Township supermarket. "Many folks are buying cases at a time."

Local businesses, restaurant and health facilities responded to the alert, which asked authority customers not to drink their water without boiling it due to a filter malfunction at the water treatment plant.

The Easton Area School District canceled school today because of the water warning, according to the school district. Easton buses to non-public schools won't run. St. Jane Frances de Chantal School in Wilson Borough and Easton Catholic in Easton are closed, according to WFMZ. Notre Dame High School will be open, athletic director Tony Koury said. Wilson Area schools are open, Superintendent Doug Wagner said.

Pawelski said Giant had to order a special delivery of bottled water Saturday to keep up with the demand.

Mike Gallagher, a manager at the Save-A-Lot supermarket in Wilson Borough, said the store saw a 50 percent increase in bottled water sales Saturday.

"They've been coming in just for that," he said. "Everybody was talking about the alert."

The alert is expected to remain in place until at least this morning as the authority awaits lab results from water tests, according to Erin Schulberger, the authority's customer relations manager.

The level of turbidity, or cloudiness, in the water exceeded normal levels for a brief time Saturday, which leads to an increased chance the water may contain disease-causing organisms. Authority officials said the chances of becoming sick are very slim.

Easton Hospital officials said Sunday they had received no reports of illness due to the water.

But the hospital itself had to tap into its own emergency water supply and purchase some extra bottled water in order to provide drinking water and prepare food for its patients.

"We had plenty and then we went out and purchased more just to have some backup," said a nursing supervisor at the hospital. "But nobody's hurting for water."

Several area restaurants, from Colonial Pizza in Easton to local Subway franchises, stopped serving fountain drinks and instead provided customers with bottled water and bottled soda.

The deli at the Wawa on College Hill was also forced to close temporarily due to the water alert, an employee said.

Pawelski said the Giant turned off its ice-making machines and the water misters over the produce. The store is also unable to steam shrimp and lobsters at this time, she said.

The authority, which is based in Palmer Township, serves about 30,000 customers in Easton; Palmer, Forks, Bethlehem, Williams and Lower Nazareth townships and the boroughs of Wilson, Glendon and West Easton.

General guidelines on ways to lessen the risk of infection are available from the EPA Safe Drinking Water Hot line at 800-426-4791.

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